



**REMARKS FOR VADM THOMAS J. BARRETT, USCG (Ret.)
USDOT ACTING DEPUTY SECRETARY AND
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE PIPELINE AND
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
COMMON GROUND ALLIANCE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ORLANDO, FL
-- MARCH 7, 2007 --**

Thank you, Bob (*Bob Kipp, CGA President*), for that wonderful introduction... and thanks to each of you for the warm welcome.

I am delighted to be here with you. The Bush Administration, Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, and our team at the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) all appreciate having you as a very strong partner in fulfilling our commitment to provide for pipeline safety and environmental protection.

Secretary Peters has made safety a top priority for our Department. She regrets that she is unable to be here with us this morning, but she wanted you to know she understands and appreciates the value of your outstanding initiative, and she asked me to share this letter with you.

Just yesterday, I had the privilege to begin serving as Acting Deputy Secretary. In this capacity I look forward to continuing to build on the Administration's safety record. And that brings us to why we are here today. As you know the national safety record in the pipeline industry is very good and getting steadily better with one exception, pipe failures caused by construction damages. Your efforts – along with the PIPES Act President Bush recently signed into law – go right at this critical safety problem.

Your initiative, the Common Ground Alliance - what a terrific name to capture your approach by the way - is what I would term an original "enterprise approach" to a serious safety problem. I would like to take a minute to congratulate and thank you for your superb on-going work.

Thirty (30) years ago a team of scientists and engineers came together and developed the space shuttle Enterprise. Although it never flew in space it was crucial to the Space Shuttle program. Its test flights in the atmosphere provided the basis for shuttle operation. And its successful delivery required the collaboration, commitment, and vision of many talented people in and outside the orbiter program. If any of you have ever visited the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum's Udvar-Hazy Center at Dulles International Airport to view the Shuttle Enterprise, it stands as proof there is nothing Americans cannot accomplish if we truly come together with common purpose, energy and commitment.

Today there is an “Enterprise” vision and cause of action in this room. We all came together because there was a need to do something to help prevent damages to the underground infrastructure and to save lives. Multiple stakeholders with vested interests in America’s underground infrastructure came together to share ideas, techniques and strategies. You mobilized to work with us to complete the “Common Ground Study of One-Call Systems and Damage Prevention Best Practices” and form the Common Ground Alliance.

However, you didn’t stop there. With the passage of the Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002, you worked with the Federal government, most notably the Federal Communications Commission, facility operators, excavators and one-call notification system operators to establish a 3-digit nationwide toll-free telephone number—811. And I hope to see many of you on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., on May 1, when we officially unveil the number and launch a public awareness campaign.

You were also instrumental in helping achieve Congressional passage of the PIPES Act. I extend my thanks to the membership of the CGA for the role you played. I firmly believe it was another “enterprise approach” that yielded the successful legislative result – we worked together to set priorities, accommodating each other where we could, narrowing gaps along the way, and reinforcing the importance of the legislation in raising national attention to managing systems on a risk basis and targeting our number one risk, construction related damage.

To PHMSA, the PIPES Act is about managing system risk and doing so in a data-driven, fully transparent manner. To a great extent, Congress validated and reinforced this program approach which, for pipelines, we term integrity management. PHMSA uses integrity management as the primary strategy to integrate protection of infrastructure and people and manage the pipeline systems’ risk through plans and safety processes that attain improved safety performance. This strategy must be communicated and understood to provide transparency of risk, and effective controls and feedback on how they are working.

PHMSA will continue to apply a systems-based approach to assess and manage safety related risk, especially those risks that change over time. We will utilize data to analyze results, make the best decisions, and deploy our attention and resources against the greatest risks, worst first. You are utilizing a similar technique to reducing risk and damages to underground facilities through the Damage Information Reporting Tool. The collection of data will help to educate all underground stakeholders on why events occur and the best prevention tactics to employ to enhance protection of people and infrastructure.

In reality, we are asking stakeholders with common goals to share responsibility for improving overall system safety. With this approach guiding our collective efforts, we will undertake each action with the clearest possible definition of the problem and use an enterprise approach to conceive solutions, test them as realistically as we can, and move to execute.

We fully expect the strengthened state programs the PIPES Act will foster, coupled with the 811 Public Awareness Campaign, to substantially reduce the number of incidents to pipelines and the rest of the underground infrastructure.

There is another Administration and DOT initiative I want to briefly bring to your attention this morning – one that affects your businesses and the economy of the communities where you work. We need to reduce congestion.

Transportation lies at the core of the freedom we enjoy as Americans –freedom to go where we want, when we want, and freedom to live and work where we choose. All told, traffic congestion costs businesses billions of dollars each year in wasted time and fuel. If you add schedule changes, buffer time requirements, substitute deliveries, and lost customers to the total, the costs climb higher still. Congestion is affecting your companies and activities at a time when our economy is more powerful and productive than ever before. Congestion is also harmful to our environment.

It will take innovative approaches to reduce congestion both in the short and long term and that is what DOT is and will be promoting. We will target traffic tie-ups in many forms: metropolitan area congestion, congestion along major corridors, congestion at our largest border crossings and at our busiest ports, and last, but not least, congestion in our skies.

Growth in public confidence can assist the Department in our efforts. One way you can help is to be sure our underground networks remain as efficient and reliable as possible – whether it's fiber optic cables used for communication or pipelines that carry fuel for our transportation systems. We want to work with stakeholders up front to address any concerns and promote innovative and practical solutions.

Protection of these underground resources is a shared responsibility. We need your leadership and commitment to a high-level of safety performance that is fully transparent to the public. As risks change over time, we need to be vigilant to assess these risks and communicate about how we control them, now and in the future. Sharing best practices in managing these changes is an important element of our work together.

The work you continue to do as CGA volunteers has made you incredibly influential in the eyes of local, state and federal governments. When you speak with one voice on the importance of protecting underground facilities, people listen.

I congratulate you for your volunteer spirit and the great work you do everyday. The Department of Transportation and PHMSA stand ready and willing to work with you. We are proud to be your partners in reducing damage to pipelines and harm to our communities.

And now Bob if you will join me I would like to recognize your work with PHMSA's very first Enterprise Spirit Award to the Common Ground Alliance.

Thank you.

###